



The Healthy Kids Community Challenge

Our Indigenous community is one of 45 communities participating in The Healthy Kids Community Challenge. This program unites communities across Ontario with a common goal: to improve our children's health through physical activity and healthy eating. These 2 factors are key to helping kids maintain a healthy weight.

There are 6 Aboriginal Health Access Centres participating in the program, as well as many other communities with Indigenous populations.

Important to note:

- In this fact sheet, the term “Indigenous” refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people. For data accuracy and consistency, the term “Aboriginal” is used when referring to specific statistics (See Quick Facts on page 7 for statistics about Ontario's Aboriginal population).
- Statistics do not fully capture individual, family or community lived experience. For Indigenous communities, this is even more apparent. Data gaps exist for Indigenous people due to a lack of trust with disclosing personal and community-level information (including in census and government data collection) and a history of colonialism. For these reasons, the data provided throughout this fact sheet may be limited. They may or may not portray a fully accurate picture.

Theme 3:

Choose to boost veggies and fruit.

This theme focuses on getting children to eat more vegetables and fruit. The goal is to encourage kids and families to make vegetables and fruit a part of every meal and snack.

During Theme 3, The Healthy Kids Community Challenge communities will work to encourage kids to eat more vegetables and fruit by:

- Improving knowledge, skills and behaviours around healthy eating.
- Making vegetables and fruit easy to access in the places kids live, learn and play.

Communities will be doing this through campaigns, policies, programs, activities and other supports.

Why do we want kids to eat more veggies and fruit?

- When we asked Local Project Managers about Theme 3, almost all said that vegetable and fruit consumption is an issue that their community needs to address¹.
- Vegetables and fruit are good for kids. They are a rich source of vitamins, minerals, fibre and other plant nutrients.
 - ~ Eating a healthy diet can help lower blood pressure and improve overall health².
 - ~ Eating more veggies and fruit as part of a healthy diet, combined with physical activity, can help reduce chronic disease³.
- For Indigenous communities, there are special benefits to getting kids to eat more vegetables and fruit:
 - ~ The Healthy Food Guidelines for First Nations communities suggest that eating vegetables and fruit daily, while limiting less healthy, higher calorie food, can help reduce the risk of diabetes and heart disease⁴.
 - ~ The First Nations Regional Health Survey (2008/10) shows that almost always eating a balanced and nutritious diet was linked with ‘excellent’ health. Indigenous children who eat well were also more likely to:
 - > Take part in sports lessons or teams, traditional drumming, singing or dancing.
 - > Eat and share traditional foods (for example: game, fish and berries).
 - > Eat vegetables and fruit several times a day.
 - > Not consume soft drinks or fast food⁵.
 - ~ Indigenous communities hold traditional knowledge on food and food sharing. This knowledge can be used more widely in the community.

“We can think of our child as a flower. A flower needs nourishment, love and care. Think of our children as a garden. They need a place to show their beauty and pride.”

~ Cowichan Tribes Elder, 2009⁶

Promoting food sovereignty

The First Nations Health Authority Healthy Food Guidelines define food sovereignty as follows:

*“Food Sovereignty” is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agriculture, labour, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, spiritually, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. Indigenous Food Sovereignty also includes the elements of sacredness and self-determination”*⁷.

Many Indigenous communities are now taking steps towards food sovereignty. These efforts will open up opportunities for further conversations on this important theme.

Promoting traditional food

Traditional food is an important aspect of food sovereignty for Indigenous people and communities. Traditional foods come from local plant or animal resources through gathering, growing, fishing, trapping or harvesting. Traditional food can include game, moose, deer, seaweed, berries and roots. Benefits may include:

- Obtaining traditional foods can be very physically demanding. It can energize kids and families while boosting their fitness.
- Kids who grow up with the presence of a hunter, fisher or gatherer have more access to healthy traditional food. This can lower their risk of childhood obesity⁸.

- Eating traditional food is healthy. It builds a strong cultural identity and values⁹. It is also linked to a higher intake of protein, iron, zinc and vitamins A and D because traditional foods are nutrient-rich¹⁰.

Access to and use of traditional food has changed over time. Some of the reasons for this include:

- The availability of and access to store-bought and ready-made food.
- Climate change and other environmental concerns (for example, pollution).
- The high cost and amount of time needed for hunting, harvesting and processing traditional food.

Indigenous people are finding new ways to bring traditional foods back into their home and community. In some communities, protecting, restoring, and relying on traditional foods can help create better food security.

How can our community encourage our Indigenous kids to eat more vegetables and fruit while following a traditional diet? Try including root vegetables, field berries, cranberries, corn, squash, greens (such as dandelion) and stews as part of a healthy diet.



Healthy behaviours – How do we make better food choices?

Indigenous Community-Based Food Guides

Food guides can help support and educate families in our community on how to make better food and drink choices. This is not always easy.

Indigenous communities have unique needs and challenges. For example, it can be challenging to balance store-bought and traditional foods. Store-bought items tend to be easy to access and can be more affordable. But they are often less healthy.

Indigenous community-based food guides are tremendously helpful, for they consider these factors in their design. Several Indigenous food guides are listed below. Together, they represent some of the geographical and cultural diversity within the Indigenous community. Let's work together to encourage an understanding of our community's unique food traditions and histories.

1. First Nations Health Authority Healthy Food Guidelines

These guidelines are broken down by food group with 3 categories: **“leave off the table”**; **“sometimes on the table”** and **“great on the table anytime”**. For vegetables and fruit, examples include:

- a) Leave off the table – fruit with a sugar coating, potato chips, french fries and raw, home canned or cooked fresh/frozen vegetables or fruit served with buttery or creamy sauces.
- b) Sometimes on the table – dried fruit, raw, home canned or cooked fresh/frozen vegetables or fruit cooked with low-fat sauces.
- c) Great on the table anytime – raw, home canned or cooked fresh/frozen vegetables or fruit, or homemade salsa¹¹.

2. The Coastal B.C. Native Food Guide¹²

This guide suggests eating a variety of food each day from each of the food groups. It includes a list of examples of traditional foods in each category: bone and milk products; meat, fish, birds and eggs; berries and vegetables; breads and cereals; other foods.

3. The Inuit/Nunavut Food Guide¹³

This guide suggests enjoying foods from each of the following categories: meat and alternatives; milk and alternatives; grain products and vegetables and fruit. It uses graphics to tell the story. The focus is on Inuit culture and traditional food practices.

4. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide – First Nations, Inuit, and Metis¹⁴

Indigenous peoples have different traditions and sometimes different food choices from those of the general Canadian population. *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide – First Nations, Inuit, and Metis* was developed to reflect those traditions. It helps explain how traditional foods can be used in combination with store-bought foods for healthy eating habits. The Food Guide is available in Plains Cree, Woods Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut.

More information for each of these food guides, along with 12 traditional recipes can be found under the “Additional Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet.

What do we want kids to eat?

Canada's Food Guide recommends children aged 2-13 years old eat between 4-6 servings of vegetables and fruit each day.

Recommended Number of Food Guide Servings per Day ¹⁵			
Age in Years	2-3	4-8	9-13
Number of Vegetable and Fruit Servings	4	5	6

What's a serving?

People may understand that vegetables and fruit are a healthy choice. But many do not know what a serving looks like. Canada's Food Guide offers these examples of serving sizes for common vegetables and fruit.

One serving of vegetables can include:

- 125 mL, (½ cup) or 1 ear of corn
- 125 mL, (½ cup) or 4 florets of cauliflower or broccoli
- 125 mL, (½ cup) or 1 large carrot
- 125 mL, (½ cup) or 6 spears of asparagus
- 125 mL, (½ cup) of cooked fresh, frozen or canned vegetables such as beans, carrots, okra, bitter melon, bok choy or squash
- 250 mL, (1 cup) of raw leafy greens such as lettuce, kale, or spinach
- 125 mL, (½ cup) of tomato, or tomato sauce

One serving of fruit can include:

- 1 medium apple, orange, peach, pear or banana
- 20 cherries or grapes
- 125 mL, (½ cup) of fresh or frozen berries, melon, mango or plantain



Challenges we may encounter

As we look for ways to encourage our Indigenous kids and families to eat vegetables and fruit at every meal and snack, we need to keep in mind the unique values, experiences and challenges of our community. A range of factors influence and create challenges and barriers to Indigenous communities and families, including:

Food security and food insecurity within Indigenous Populations

- **Access** to vegetables and fruit.
- **Cost** of vegetables and fruit.
- **Inconsistent quality** of produce.
- **Availability** of nutritious food.

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”¹⁶.

- There are 4 pillars of food security: availability, stability of supply, access and utilization¹⁷.
- Access to healthy foods like vegetables and fruit depends on income. Less healthy foods often cost less. Because of this, food insecurity is linked to poor diets.
 - ~ One-third of Indigenous households living off-reserve are food insecure¹⁸.
- Food insecurity varies in First Nation reserves and communities with remote communities facing greater prevalence¹⁹.
 - ~ The rate of food insecurity among Indigenous peoples in Canada was reported to be double that of the general population (28.2%, excluding First Nations peoples living on reserve, versus 12.6%)²⁰.
 - ~ Results from the 2012 Indigenous Peoples Survey²¹ showed that 41% of Inuit aged 15 and older lived in households facing food insecurity.
 - ~ Data addressing food insecurity is limited for Metis people²².



Getting started on Theme 3

It is up to us to develop an action plan that makes sense for our community. Here are some ideas we could consider.

- Promote food security. We can do this through education and supportive environments. We can also develop programs that address food access and availability.
- Increase access to vegetables and fruit. We can do this through community feasts that offer healthy and traditional food.
- Increase access to healthy foods in the school and after-school settings. We can do this through healthy meal programs.
- Build on grassroots community-based initiatives already in place.
- Develop education and awareness of what makes a nutritious diet (including vegetables and fruit). We can help families and communities understand that optimal health can include both store-bought and traditional foods.
- Provide additional education on traditional foods. This includes the food skills required to gather, hunt, prepare and store it properly.
- Create and enhance community programs to improve access to vegetables and fruit. We can offer these programs in community, educational and recreational settings.
- Support the development and enhancement of community gardens. These projects can promote healthy eating and provide nutritious foods to community events, gatherings and families.
- Increase the use of traditional foods. We can protect and restore their place in our community. This can provide greater food security and better food choices.
- Create healthy and supportive environments to support long-lasting changes. We can focus on our schools, childcare environments, community settings and our homes.
- Develop culturally appropriate nutritional resources and messaging.
- Make it easy to access information about cultural, local and traditional foods.
- Promote cultural pride.
- Host canning events in our community.

Keep in mind

- Many Indigenous communities approach health and wellness in a holistic way. This means the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements must all be in balance in a person.
- Indigenous peoples' health and well-being is influenced by very real historical factors. These include social, economic and political inequities.

“In the community, we have lots of knowledge.” We used a holistic approach to food, the environment and health expressed by community members, and defined partnership as working together in “kindness, caring, and understanding.”

~ Talking Circle Participant, as cited in Food Security in a Northern First Nations Community: An Exploratory Study on Food Availability and Accessibility²³.



Quick facts

- In 2011, over 300,000 of the self-identified Aboriginal population – about 20% – in Canada lived in Ontario. This equals about 2.5% of Ontario’s total population.
 - ~ This number includes three distinct constitutionally recognized Aboriginal groups in Canada: 209,510 First Nations people, 86,020 Métis, and 3,360 Inuit²⁴.
- The Aboriginal population tends to be younger than the non-Aboriginal population.
 - ~ In Ontario, four in 10 (more than 40%) Aboriginal people are under the age of 25. About 30% of the non-Aboriginal population are in this age group²⁵.
- Studies show that Aboriginal people have higher rates of overweight and obesity than the general population. They also have a shorter life expectancy.
 - ~ For Aboriginal children and youth aged 2-17, living off reserve, about 60% are at a healthy weight. The rest are overweight or obese²⁶.
 - ~ Among First Nations children aged 2-11, living in on reserve First Nations communities, about 40% are at a normal weight or underweight. The rest are overweight or obese²⁷.
- Results from the 2007/2008 Regional Health Survey completed by the parents/guardians of First Nations children (ages 2-11) show that about 60% “always” or “almost always” ate a nutritious balanced diet. Less than 5% of children very rarely or never ate a nutritious balanced diet. The survey showed:
 - ~ About 35% of children ate vegetables several times a day.
 - ~ Almost 50% of children ate fruit (not including juice) several times a day.
 - ~ About 10% of First Nations children living off reserve, 9% of Metis children, and 24% of Inuit children (all aged 2-5) ate fast food or processed food daily²⁸.
- A review of the diets of Canadian First Nations youths (ages 6-18) living in remote or isolated settings suggests the diets are energy-dense and nutrient poor. These kids do not eat enough veggies and fruit. They also tend to eat too many sugar sweetened beverages, snacks and fast foods²⁹. This is likely due to the high costs of fresh food and related transportation and storage costs.
- The environment where children learn, live and play can influence whether or not they eat a healthy balanced diet. For example, whether a child lives in a home with two parents, a single parent, or extended family can affect their food choices and access to veggies and fruit.
- Aboriginal people are eating less traditional food than they used to³⁰.
 - ~ Based on 2004 data, Aboriginal people get only 6% to 40% of their calories from traditional food³¹.
- When families eat together, meals are more likely to be more nutritious. It is also a time where the family can enjoy valuable time to reconnect³².



Additional resources you may find helpful

The Healthy Weights Connection database of Indigenous community resources:

http://www.healthyweightsconnection.ca/resources/other-resources?filter_2521=17

First Nations Health Authority Healthy Food Guidelines for First Nations Communities:

http://www.fnha.ca/documents/healthy_food_guidelines_for_first_nations_communities.pdf

Southern Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative:

<http://soadi.ca/>

Coastal B.C Food Guide: <http://www.wabano.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Coastal-BC-Native-Food-Guide.pdf>

Inuit Food Guide(s): <http://www.wabano.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Nunavut-Food-Guide-side-1.pdf> & <http://www.wabano.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Nunavut-Food-Guide-side-2.pdf>

Traditional food fact sheets: http://www.fnha.ca/Documents/Traditional_Food_Fact_Sheets.pdf

Aboriginal Nutrition Network (under the auspices of the Dietitians of Canada): <http://www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Specific-Populations/Aboriginal-Nutrition.aspx>

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide - First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Health Canada): <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/fnim-pnim/index-eng.php>

The Dietitians of Canada's Aboriginal Nutrition Network - 12 Traditional Food Recipes: <http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Nutrition-A-Z/Cooking/Indigenous-Recipes.aspx>

To learn more about the activities in our community or to get involved, contact your Healthy Kids Community Challenge Local Project Manager:

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Name

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Email

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Telephone

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Website

Learn more about healthy eating for kids at Ontario.ca/healthykids

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